



Army Transforming America

Preserving Our Environmental Legacy

THE Army's warfighting mission focuses on the soldier's sometimes-necessary task to "kill people and destroy things." It could equally be argued, however, that a soldier's true task is to "protect lives and preserve things." The Army as a protective force has a well-known history stretching from the cavalry units that escorted pioneers across America's expanding frontiers to soldiers of the post-Cold War Army who promote peace and democracy in places as diverse as Bosnia, Kosovo, Haiti, Somalia and South Korea. The Army's role in environmental stewardship, however, is less well known.

Take Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming for example. From 1886 to 1918, soldiers patrolled Yellowstone with two primary missions: protecting wildlife and preserving Yellowstone's natural features. This was no simple task, what with poachers shooting game and tourists trampling and defacing the park. Yet the Army succeeded in making Yellowstone safe, as one service official has put it, "for both its wild inhabitants and park visitors while instilling the new idea of a national park." Soldiers performed similar service in protecting and preserving the Yosemite, Sequoia and General Grant National Parks in California after Congress established them in 1891. Then, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the Army redeemed lives and restored land through its supervision and training of Civilian Conservation Corps workers [*see March 2001 Soldiers*].

Environmental concerns have also been a part of the Army's day-to-day mission, as it balances the demands of maintaining a natural environment for military training and safeguarding important natural resources. This once primarily meant putting out forest fires caused by Army training maneuvers. Today, it means much more. Because of the Army's aggressive conservation measures, environmentalists call many Army posts "oases" for endangered plants, animals and migratory birds.

At Makua Military Range in Oahu, Hawaii, for example, the area teems with rare and endangered plant and animal species because the Army has installed a 10-mile fence to keep out wild goats and pigs whose grazing has wreaked havoc on the fragile ecosystem. At Fort Jackson, S.C., soldiers and environmentalists, working together, have converted more than 4,000 acres of land to longleaf pine growth and doubled the number of endangered red-cockaded woodpeckers on post.

At other installations, the Army has reduced pollution and increased recycling as means of preserving the local environment. It has also identified and protected countless American archeological sites on various posts and standardized how it implements the Native American Graves Protection Act.

Through these conservation and historic-preservation measures, the Army is transforming its landscapes, even in places once scarred by tank treads and pocked by artillery shells. Countless generations of Americans will reap the benefits from the Army's legacy of protecting and preserving the nation's environmental and cultural richness. — CPT Patrick Swan